DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 477 223 FL 027 708

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TITLE Global English and Language Teaching in the Twenty-First Century. Occasional Paper.

INSTITUTION Southampton Univ. (England). Centre for Language Education.
REPORT NO CLE-OP-59
PUB DATE 2002-10-00
NOTE 15p.
AVAILABLE FROM Centre for Language in Education, Research & Graduate School of Education, University of Southhampton, Southampton SO17 1BJ, England, United Kingdom. Tel: 00-44-0-1703-592433; Fax: 00-44-0-1703-593556; e-mail: rc4@soton.ac.uk; Web site: http://www.education.soton.ac.uk/research_and_centres/centres_and_divisions/.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS English (Second Language) ; Foreign Countries; *Global Approach; *Second Language Instruction; Second Language Learning; Secondary Education
IDENTIFIERS United Kingdom

ABSTRACT

This paper examines how attitudes toward teaching English may need to change in the 21st century, noting shifts in the environment within which language teachers and learners operate that relate partly to the English language itself and partly to the political and social contexts within which it is used. The paper considers various positions relevant to different aspects of pedagogy, asserting that there are substantial differences between the role of English now and its role even a few years ago. It suggests that many earlier assumptions are no longer appropriate. The paper outlines the kinds of models that may help promote understanding of the new situation, and it suggests that there is value in seeing English teaching as a worldwide phenomenon in which the philosophies appropriate to particular countries and education systems need to show a systematic relationship to the philosophical principles underlying English teaching in other systems and other parts of the world. (Contains 10 references.) (SM)

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Global English and Language Teaching in the Twenty-First Century

Christopher Brumfit

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Centre for Language in Education: Occasional Paper No. 59

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October 2002

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FL027708

GLOBAL ENGLISH AND LANGUAGE TEACHING IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

The purpose of this paper is to consider how our attitudes to English teaching may need to change in the twenty-first century. In the last decade of the twentieth century a number of important shifts became apparent in the environment within which language teachers and learners operate. These relate partly to the English language itself, but partly to the political and social context in which it is used. In addressing this question, I shall consider a number of basic positions relevant to different aspects of pedagogy. Sometimes these provide models which may be useful in thinking about English teaching today; at other times they are expressed more informally as statements of principle. I argue that there are substantial differences between the role of English now and its role even a few years ago, and suggest that many of our earlier assumptions are no longer appropriate. This paper attempts tentatively to outline the kinds of model that may help us to understand the new situation. It also suggests that there is value in seeing English teaching, concerned as it is with the most widely-used language of world communication, as a world-wide phenomenon in which the philosophies appropriate to particular countries and education systems need to show a systematic relationship to the philosophical principles underlying English teaching in other systems and other parts of the world. Because out teaching materials, teacher education, research and methodologies exchange data and ideas all the time, we are unavoidable part of a world-wide system which needs explaining if we are to avoid significant risks of exploitation or confusion.

Background

A convenient starting point for my argument is October 2001, when at a conference in Birmingham UK, the European Year of Languages was celebrated in a festival of language. Learners young and old described their successes in studying languages, academics discussed the current state of language teaching and learning, and a framework for language policies for the UK was outlined. Similar events took place in almost all European countries during the year, and they provided an opportunity for Europeans to examine the legacy of the flurry of language activity that had accompanied the excitement of the 1960s. During that decade many national and international language associations (including AILA, IATEFL and TESOL) had been founded, and the foundations of what was later to be called "the communicative approach" had been laid. Throughout the 1970s this approach, with closely associated "humanistic" approaches and "natural" methods, was consolidated as the default position in foreign language teaching methodology, spread to the United States, and became well-established as the aspirant methodology (even if practice was more cautious) throughout the last two decades of the century. While doubts were expressed about inappropriate methodologies (eg Holliday, 1994), it is probably fair to say that the communicative approach has not since been superseded by a more powerful consensual model.

This is not the place to explore the main features of this approach. However, it is worth noting that, while still providing the prevailing title for many short courses and much award-bearing pre-service training for language teachers, the term become sufficiently vague as to become almost synonymous with "good" teaching, without necessarily having strong grounding in unique communicative principles. A tendency to value production and

participation is shared with (eg) the Direct Method. The reintroduction of grammar and awareness-raising activities in the later years of the century restored the link with (eg) grammar-translation. And the strongest features of the early procedures: notional syllabuses, needs analysis and functional analysis as a means of organising class activities have only survived in a weak orientation towards language in use. Yet the term "communicative language teaching" persists.

This could be considered surprising if we believe the major claims about recent changes in the linguistic environment that were made by David Crystal at the Birmingham conference. He suggested that the 1990s had seen three fundamental changes in our attitudes to language:

> (1) The Internet has given all languages potential access to an international audience, and enabled minority language users to keep in touch even when they are geographically separated.
> (2) It is now widely acknowledged that the rate at which languages are dying is a matter for international concern.
> (3) English, already spoken more widely than any other language in the history of the world, was for the first time spoken by more second than first language users.

These are indeed major issues for us all. But it is also worth noting other major changes of the past thirty years, not about language, which are just as radical in their impact. For language teaching cannot afford to be parochial in its concerns, and there are wider changes, too, which relate closely to these changes. Sometimes they contribute to them directly, as when the global market reinforces the demand for the spread of English. Sometimes they appear to have only a very indirect relationship with English teaching, as with the AIDS epidemic. But arguably they too will have a profound impact on our attitudes to language, language learning, and the role of language in education. It is the purpose of this paper to explore the implications of all these changes for the practice of English teaching.

As the first of these external factors, we should note the major shifts in the balance of power which have taken place since the 1960s. The 1973 oil crisis shifted wealth substantially away from the old industrial countries towards the middle east and consolidated the decline of the older European imperial powers. This tendency took time to work its way through the world, and combined with many other factors to establish a re-alignment in world power. The collapse of 18th and 19th century empires was most conspicuous in the break-up of the soviet empire, but the process of re-alignment of which that was a symptom was reflected in a gradual but unmistakeable equalisation of wealth between the rising economies of Asia and the European and north American industrial states. At the same time, the impact of the Aids epidemic, particularly on Africa, resulted in an integration of powerful economies which effectively ignored substantial parts of the world that did not develop as much as had been hoped in the 1960s. The hopes of the 1960s for most of Africa, some parts of Asia and much of Latin America fell foul of monetarist policies imposed from outside, as well as much internal political confusion and corruption, and a series of unexpected natural disasters. It is not the purpose of this paper to argue about the political and economic impacts of monetary theories or of World Bank policies. But it is necessary to note that for whatever reason the economic map of the world is radically different from what might have been predicted in the 1960s.

Language teaching now operates in a world in which American power is relatively unchallenged by other states, and in which it is widely held that the principles on which the

American economy rests have been justified by its success and by the lack of success of alternatives. We have recently seen a rapprochement with Russia and with China, so that the power boundaries between industrial states appear less important than the boundaries across them between the rich and the poor. At the moment conflict between super-powers (previously dealt with by conventional politics) seems unlikely in the short-term: the greatest threat to the most powerful country is apparently independent of conventional politics and emerging from those who feel dispossessed, or alienated by what they believe to be the materialism of the west. Meanwhile traditionally powerful states associate themselves more and more with the market economies, leaving those outside such economies more and more isolated.

Educational as well as economic models deriving from Europe and North America have been widely accepted, but we should note that the process of the so-called global economy is a product of closer relationships as well as a creator of them. Only an economy in which labour can be called upon from "cheap" regions across the world can operate globally. At the same time, three technological changes reinforce globalization spectacularly. First, the increase in air traffic means that within 24 hours most people who can afford to can get to almost every significant centre of population in the world. Second, TV means that visual images of rich countries are beamed for the whole world to see (even though – indeed perhaps because - the images are often fictionalized or idealized they have a potentially massive impact). Third, the communication revolution means that individuals can communicate globally with almost anyone they choose providing they have access to the Web or to mobile phone technology. Even for people who cannot themselves directly own this technology the impact is immense, partly because television images are already accessible to vast numbers through external agencies, and partly because the impact of world economic policies affects even the smallest village in many parts of the third world, and individuals in those villages are often aware of this.

Thus the three linguistic factors which Crystal has identified are reinforced by these non-linguistic changes. The English language is increasingly seen as the language of global success, the power of the Internet binds those with sophisticated technology closer and closer to each other, and the forces of world economy create conditions in which minority languages and cultures, in a pure form) are increasingly felt to be insufficient for personal survival by some of their members. Thus many people move towards greater immersion in global culture, either through education, or through migration (often intended to be temporary) whether legal or illegal. Either way, the effect is that human diversity is liable to be reduced.

We should recognise that these are not by any means new forces in international relations. The USA and Australia are both countries with majorities of inhabitants who made either forced or voluntary migration; the cruelties and frictions generated in both countries, and by those who ran the human trade which caused these developments, are not different in kind from those which pertain now. Indeed the Atlantic slave trade, and much of the history of Asia, Africa and Europe of the past two hundred years, is a story of massive misery and destabilisation for massive numbers of people.

Yet this simplified account obscures as much as it clarifies, superficially convincing as it may seem, it cannot – without substantial modification – provide us with an adequate guide to how we should address the most appropriate underlying principles for language education. Nonetheless, it does indicate part of the context within which we have to operate.

What is most notable now is the visibility of these processes. The technology that Crystal refers to, the increasing use of a shared language, means that we are much more aware, both through verbal communication and through imagery, of what is happening. We participate more knowingly, and English teaching contributes to our knowingness.

The English Language Today

English is the lingua franca for a substantial minority of the world's population. Simply by introducing the same language as the first foreign language learnt in different countries, governments have changed world communication. If a Hungarian (or Tunisian) meets a Korean (or Brazilian) in Germany (or Russia), they can assume that English is the default language for communication. But this shift accompanies the other shifts that Crystal mentions, and English teachers have to see changes in English use as part of a wider picture of change.

If we cautiously project from figures by Crystal (1997) or Graddol (1997) we can see approximately the following scenario for English:

1. There are about 6 billion people in the world;
2. About one in **three** of these lives in countries where English is a significant language (ie Kachru's inner and outer circles);
3. About one in **eighteen** speaks a variety of English as a mother tongue (inner circle);
4. A further one in **twenty-five** uses English as a regular international language (outer circle);
5. Outside this group, about one in **sixty** people in the world has learnt English as a foreign language with some competence (expanding circle);
6. So overall, about one in **nine** people in the world can speak English.

But these figures conceal a number of changes which are obscured by the use of traditional categories. First, the vast majority of people in the outer circle do not use English normally and do not have particular competence in it. Second, the distinctions obscure the fact that the members of the expanding circle who do use English are an increasing significant group who operate in an increasingly global economy which has an impact on the economy in all countries. Third, the Internet, mobile phones and other technology increasingly establishes the potential for use of English which is quite independent of the controls offered by traditional educational systems, publishing outlets and radio/television.

Thus a more appropriate model might stratify English language users across all these countries in the following way:

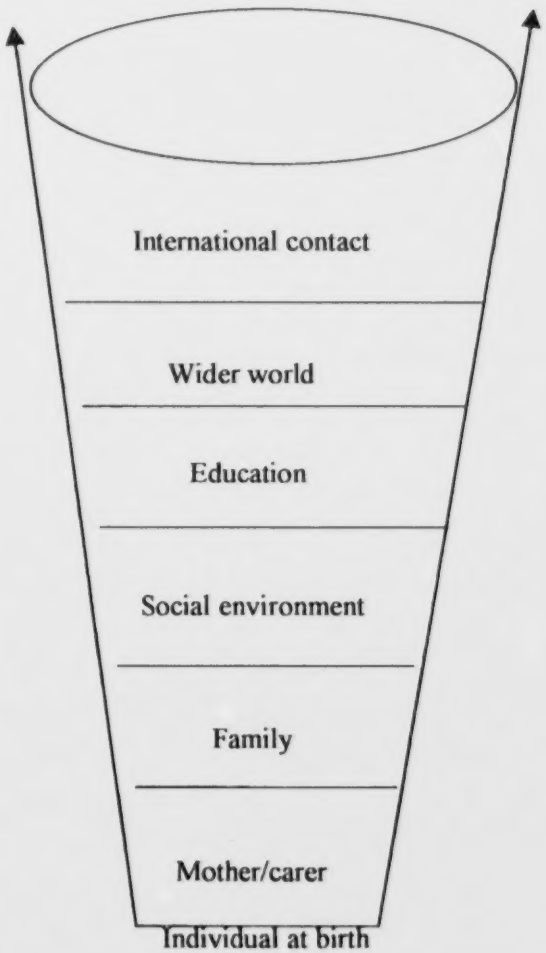
1. Those who operate within the domain of English as a world auxiliary language by direct contact with other speakers;
2. Those who have access to international contact by electronic means, who create their own personal language through text messaging, e-mail and operate independently of controls and filters;
3. Those in an intermediate position, with some access to global cinema, TV etc but are not themselves active users;
4. Those who are outside the international system altogether.

Now of course these are not discrete categories, for the boundaries are blurred, but they do reflect possible aspirations for our learners, as well as defining some of the practices of international communication. We should also note that in principle these categories need not refer solely to English. In some contexts for other languages, for example with Chinese in East Asia or Spanish in South America, the same set of categories could be relevant. Nor, we should note, will it be easy to quantify, even approximately, the numbers of people in each category, for they reflect changing patterns, and they are not based on the national populations used by analysts such as Crystal or Kachru.

Language acquisition and learning

The changes in English use that are occurring around us result from rapid social and environmental changes. What is the most appropriate way of thinking about language acquisition in such a context?

It is helpful to think of language development as a process of extending repertoires. In a 1985 paper I sketched some aspects of this (Brumfit 1985: 57) and I present a modified version of this below.



There are a number of issues which deserve consideration if we think of language acquisition as a process of extending repertoires.

First, we should note that repertoire extension does not imply a fundamental difference between monolingual and multilingual behaviour. *All* language users extend their repertoires all the time, by the processes of meeting new people (genre contact), and cross-cultural communication (contact with new world-views and new functional forms). Of course these types of contact are impure, and interact with each other, but the general process is unavoidable, even if we operate within a fairly restricted environment. In the multi-communicating world of today, with opportunities to view television from a wide range of sources, and to interact by phone with contacts and by Internet with strangers from all sorts of settings, our opportunities for unconscious and accidental repertoire extension are massively increased.

But each individual only needs to consider their own life history to see how we have all moved from the language of the intimate home, to that of the wider community, to public-life uses, and (for many in the education professions) to language of international contact. Each of us has encountered new lexical items as we have moved through this process. The acquisition of new languages has marked educational transitions for many learners. And the languages we use are in part a history of the varied identities we have embraced in our different roles, and in part the means by which we mould these identities into the person that we think of as our unique self.

Second, we should note that *extension* does not imply that there is a finite amount of language that we can operate with. We *add* to our repertoires without necessarily rejecting our earlier styles. Multilinguals do not have to lose their first language (though some choose to and political circumstances do sometimes force individuals to). Typically, though, in the present era, language users develop increasing multidialectalism and increasing multilingualism and only lose the features of earlier language that are no longer exercised. In the English-using world, most learners acquire (or increase) multilingualism when they acquire English.

Of course the effect of learning new languages and new styles is to modify existing styles, for they are all part of an individual's general language system. Both socially and individually, we all use mixed styles, and are prepared to code-switch, or to play off any aspects of our repertoire against any other, perhaps for rhetorical effect, or to make a cultural comment, to joke, or to enrich the baseline language with new or modified meanings. Thus loan-words, poetic styles, cultural references, technical terms and speech act conventions may move from language to language or from one regional dialect to another. The history of any widely-used language, of any literary tradition, or of any science will testify to these widespread processes.

These principles provide us with the beginning of a framework for viewing the process of English teaching in the 21st century. But how can we theorize them more formally?

An ambitious attempt to incorporate some of these concerns can be seen in a recent book by Brutt-Griffler (2002). Her study enables us to incorporate some of the concerns outlined above into a more sophisticated framework.

Examining the development of the phenomenon of World English, Brutt-Griffler explores the implications of treating languages as the possessions of speech communities rather than of individuals. That enables us to escape from the tyranny of the monolingual speaker much commented on in the linguistic literature (see eg Romaine, 1996: 571ff) and of the native speaker (Rampton, 1990; Davies, 1991) by establishing language as a shared possession of all members of a speech community, regardless of when they acquired it. Further, it reinforces the neglected fact that all language users are in varying degrees of deficit in relation to the language opportunities available to them. No native-speakers have access to all the repertoires of the language they profess to be most expert in. Each of us can think of repertoires with which we have recently become more familiar (football-speak, perhaps, after the world cup; or the language of pedagogy after a teacher training course; or that of our adolescent children; or reflecting the interests of our newly acquired close friends).

Particularly, this way of thinking about language reduces the link between second language use and deficit. Second and foreign language speakers are members of speech communities which establish their own norms. They share these norms to varying degrees with native speakers, but they do not need to be constantly viewed as failing native-speakers.

The point which Brutt-Griffler rightly emphasizes is that the new regional varieties of English which are springing up reflect the changed status of English as an auxiliary world language whether we (either as linguists or as teachers) like it or not. The world language already exists as a subset of the multiple varieties of "the English language", and that too has its own sub-varieties. And it is this world that learners of English are joining for at least the next fifty years – in other words for the lifetime of all English teachers currently beginning their careers. Beyond that point it would be unwise to predict.

Brutt-Griffler's model of the spread of English (2002: 120) is a great deal closer to the historical record that of many critics of linguistic imperialism (Phillipson , 1992 for example). As she indicates by a careful study of imperial and colonial language practice (as well as policy), English has been demanded as well as supplied, and the shape of new Englishes has been determined by the receivers as well as the givers. On the one hand, migrants have taken their own mother tongue to many parts of the world, leading to the development of new indigenous forms in USA, Australia and elsewhere; on the other economic and cultural attraction has led non-native speakers of English to acquire it (usually by massive personal investment in education) in addition to their own mother tongue(s).

So in this model English spreads through a context of other national or local languages to the "English as a Foreign Language" situation, through multilingualism to the new varieties of English, and through migration to new varieties of the mother tongue English. In all three cases new speech communities develop themselves.

But the outcomes of this process have been complicated by the changes in language use identified by Crystal and others. The Mother Tongues have already differentiated themselves, and the New Varieties of English have been described more and more over the past three decades. But it is now clear that "English as a Foreign Language" is increasingly likely to be an equal base with the others for the world auxiliary language role. More and more speakers in traditionally foreign language countries now habitually use English to such a high degree of fluency that they are undoubtedly part of the new international speech community.

Further, we should note that to identify this phenomenon is neither to approve nor to disapprove of it. The effects can be used for good or ill, and the changes that these new language uses reflect have major negative effects on some language users (that is on some human beings) whether they do or do not include English in their repertoire. For an underlying philosophy of English teaching, the challenge is to steer our way through these uncharted waters so as to minimize the potential negative effects.

What are the implications for the EFL profession?

Certainly we have to recognise a new context for our work. Economic and political migration very sensibly tends to go to places where the linguistic difficulties will be least, so English speaking countries attract migrants, and this politically sensitive fact will not change. More importantly, the language is being taken over for an enormously wide range of belief systems, ideologies, literary traditions and spoken (or indeed sung) performance. But the language-teaching context is even more challenging when other non-linguistic changes are considered. Even written English is no longer within the control of publishers, schools, universities and governments, thanks to technological advance giving Internet access to all who can write.

But we should not become too excited. Language use is inherent in human activity, and the processes of international contact, and thus of international confusion resulting from partial contact, will not go away. How much misunderstanding of American life results from the exotic lifestyle images purveyed round the world by widely marketed television series from the Simpsons to Baywatch or Friends? The processes these (mis-)communications reflect are greater than language, but language teaching has some role in enabling an increasingly integrated world to cope with the tensions that integration generates. It is not that integration is necessarily desirable; for many of us it is not – but it will not go away, and effective communication, cultural understanding, tolerance and a commitment to helping rather than hindering the survival of all will enable us to manage cultural contact better. All these can be the goals of effective English teaching.

But such goals can only be realised if professionals recognise legitimate counter forces and legitimate fears. Too much power (and also too much English) is genuinely threatening. Within Britain monolingualism makes no sense in the new multilingual world. On the one hand, the poor must appropriate the language of the powerful in order to defend themselves. On the other, those whose linguistic inheritance includes accidental access to the languages of greatest international power, must recognise a responsibility not to misuse that privilege. As the next century raises the political stakes between the richer and poorer parts of the world, the role of the English language, for better or worse, is likely to be significant within whatever new world order emerges. If English teaching was politicised before, it is even more so now, and will remain so until wealth divisions between countries are minimised. Opting out of English is no solution; nor is guilt about its role, for the forces of technological contact are independent of language use, and if not English some other language would have the role English now has (and in due course some other language will replace it). What we have to do is manage the emerging world as speakers create it by their linguistic (and other choices, and that means being clearer about the both the gains and losses of English as a World Language.

In our teaching, then, we have to accept new ideas: that most users in international contact will be non-native speakers, so for many of our learners the goal will be communication with other non-native speakers. We must also accept that ESL use is not just a pragmatic, transactional activity, but may be, as much as the language of our families, an expression of identities and aspirations. And further, as our aspirations in a world of global contact will conflict, so English use will be a contested activity. We should be explicit and honest about its past histories and its potential future roles.

For citizens of UK, USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and other largely English speaking countries, there is a greater challenge: how to avoid being the monolingual dinosaurs in a multilingual world. No wonder the UK is thinking about internal language policy, for fewer and fewer school-leavers are reaching high levels in foreign languages at exactly the same time as more and more are in more and more other countries. The success of international ELT may leave the UK high and monolingually dry.

So for all in EFL, teachers as much as learners, the English language will bring change more rapidly in the next decade than in any until the 1990s. But where the 1990s changes resulted from technological changes, the changes of the next decade may well reflect substantial political shifts to which the spread of English, and the shift of communicative power that symbolises, have already contributed.

Specific actions: a new philosophy?

For most teachers of English language, wherever they are, the prime task ill remain to enable learners to produce the most acceptable, most fluent language they are capable of in the time available. No new basis is going to take away the concerns for helping learners to pass the threshold where they can begin tentatively to express what they want to say or write in a context where international intelligibility is an expected norm.

But at the more abstract level, some of the issues raised in this paper are going to be crucial. Most learners are not learning English to become scholars, but to participate in a world which is increasingly becoming available to them more immediately than that of previous foreign language encounters. And the immediacy is going to be local immediacy, and consequently may have potential political and social implications at local level. Thus in many traditional foreign language countries English has become the language of much higher education, English may be freely available through film and TV presentation, and casual English may be more and more prominent in local activity. Materials and classroom exercises need to recognise these as potential contexts for future activity, and more importantly need to help learners to understand that English is being produced for local and personal goals, not for an external culture in which native speakers dominate.

Simultaneously, though, each country needs its own debate about the roles that English can or may play within the culture. How this debate is to be conducted is itself a matter for debate, for the issue is delicate, both politically and socially. No outsiders can define the boundaries of such discussion for it raises not just the obvious ideological issues of domination and identity, but also questions of tact and politeness. English symbolises education, but for many it also symbolises dependence; it symbolises internationalism, but it may also emphasise perceived poverty or political impotence. Steering a way through a public professional discussion of such issues is not easy. Yet an explicit consideration of the extent

to which English is "ours" rather than "theirs" may be necessary if teaching is to respond to the realities of sociolinguistic behaviour rather than the myths that so often provide shelter from awkward problems. An identification of problems of identity potentially posed by the role of English, and humane ways of accommodating them may be a necessary theme for teacher education, and for preparation for materials development. Thus the relative roles of students'understanding of their own cultures, and of their understanding of the cultures of other English-using groups (including other non-native-speaking groups), need to be debated. However much we encourage school-to-school international Internet communication, e-mail contact, pen-pals, and similar cultural exchange, we have to remember that understanding what role English has for our own students must be a central concern, for English is party of personal aspiration for many. Recognising that foreign language use can contribute to making our identities may help learners to see what they are engaged in; ignoring such possibilities may be dysfunctional.

Above all else, the deficit relationship between "learners" and "native-speakers" needs to disappear. Ironically, this may be helped by the depressing, but probable, scenario that most English native-speakers are becoming the only highly educated monolinguals in the world. This is of course a native-speaker response to the same pressures which are making English increasingly a lingua franca for the rest of the world. But much more important than this is the need to establish for learners apprentice relationships with the community of English users, most of whom started like themselves, as school learners. In practical terms this will means that classrooms have to give greater opportunities for creativity by learners through the English-language medium, whether in speech or writing. This is because they have to learn to "be themselves" through more than one language, and to accept the extension of identities, the repertoire of identities that are implied by code switching, and by cross-language and cross-dialectal interaction. In other words, they have to accept the sociolinguistic fact that Brutt-Griffler recognises so well: that monolinguals are such untypical human beings that they are not a helpful model for a world in which there are languages of wider communication.

All this is at a high level of generality, but this is necessarily so if we are talking about underlying philosophies. At the same time, it provides the basis for an exciting period in pedagogical development. Just as the English language has broken free from native-speakers (while still being concerned with intelligibility and international contact), so too should pedagogy break free from monocultural assumptions. This will not mean that there will be no generalisations about language learners (for we are all human beings and we all have language capacities in the same way). But it does mean that the cultural context, the contingent factors within the communities producing the language, will be redefined by each community with greater and greater originality. The task of linking our awareness of language, especially languages of world communication, to the new social and political contexts which make world communication so necessary is an immense challenge. But unless we recognise the impact of global communication, we shall not respond to the multilingual future which is inexorably advancing. On the quality of that response depends the survival of minority languages and cultures as well as the humanity and justice of the mass culture in which we educated people cannot avoid participating. Thus only by understanding our unity can we protect our diversity, and only by understanding our diversity can we recognise our unity. For better or worse, for the next fifty years at least, English teaching is going to be central to this process.

Note: A modified version of this paper was presented at the conference of the Korean Association of Teachers of English, in Busan, July 2002

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